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ABSTRACT

Although much is being written about the sociological aspects of the battering syndrome, little has been done to investigate the personality characteristics of battered women. To investigate the personality characteristics which relate to the life styles of battered women, 60 women (30 battered women, 30 non-battered women), ranging in age from 19 to 56, were interviewed using Kern's Life Style Scale. The scale classifies life styles into five categories: controller, perfectionist, need to please, victim, and martyr. An analysis of the results showed that the life style typologies of battered women were significantly different from those of women who have never been battered. Women who scored high in the category of need to please lent themselves as targets to battering situations. Women who scored high in the category of controller were not as likely to be victims of abuse. (The Life Style Scale is appended). (BL)

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"BATTERED WOMEN: A LIFESTYLE STUDY"

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southeastern Psychological Association, Atlanta, GA, March 23-26, 1983.

ABSTRACT:

"BATTERED WOMEN: A LIFESTYLE STUDY"

The battered woman syndrome is a grave problem which is receiving a great deal of attention in our society today. It is no longer a private problem, but seems to be a symptom of a great flaw in our society. Although much is being explored regarding the sociological aspects of the battering syndrome, little is being written regarding the personality characteristics which composite the life styles of these women. One way to explore their life styles is through the use of the Alfred Adler Lifestyle Scale interview, which catagorizes various lifestyle typologies. After compiling the interview data, a chi square test of significance was computed, and the results indicated that this tool can be useful in allowing battering victims to become aware of their lifestyle typologies. In addition, the lifestyle interview results could help to curb the rising battering rate among women by serving as a guide in screening potential victims of physical abuse.

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Introduction

The battered woman syndrome is a grave problem which is receiving a great deal of attention in our society today. It is no longer a private problem but appears to be a symptom of a great flaw in our social system. It is much more than the battering act itself or the personal interaction between a woman and her mate. The syndrome seems to have its roots in historical attitudes towards women, in the economy, in the institution of marriage, and in the criminal justice system.

Today, with the help of women's support groups, much is being written about the battered woman and why she chooses to continue to stay with her mate despite repeated acts of violence inflicted upon her. Her most common reasons for staying include lack of financial means, lack of occupational skills, low self-esteem, fear of her mate, and a general feeling of inadequacy to make it on her own in the outside world. Little has been written, however, regarding the personality characteristics which composite the life styles of these women. A unique way to explore their life styles is through the use of the personal interview technique using Alfred Adler's life style concept, a counseling tool which can measure a person's characteristic theme regarding personality as well as the person's ability and method of facing life's problems. This concept is one of Adler's most significant contributions to the field of psychology.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the life style typologies of 60 women in order to show that women who are currently victims or have recently been victims of repeated battering incidents will show significantly different life style typologies than those women who have never been the victims of battering.

Method

Data reported were collected from private interviews and counseling sessions with 30 battered women ranging in age from 19 years to 56 years and with 30 non-battered women of similar ages and socio-economic backgrounds. The study was conducted during April, 1980 through June, 1980, at the Council on Battered Women, Atlanta, Georgia, and at various women's group meetings in the City of Atlanta, and in Fulton County and DeKalb County, Georgia.

Instrument

The instrument used in the study was the Lifestyle Scale, developed by Roy M. Kern, PhD., Georgia State University in Atlanta, Georgia. The instrument, when employed, effectively classifies life styles into five distinct typology catagories labeled CONTROLLER,

PERFECTIONIST, NEED TO PLEASE, VICTIM, and MARTYR. Briefly explained, CONTROLLER indicates a typology who is demanding, somewhat rebellious, and who is in physical and psychological control of self. PERFECTIONIST specifies having high standards of right and wrong, demanding perfection, needing to be right, and worrying about making decisions. NEED TO PLEASE indicates the need to be good, to be obedient, to show concern for others, and to seek approval. VICTIM is pessimistic and complaining, feels most punished, has low standards of accomplishment, has few friends, and endorses negative attributes, self-pity, and resignation. The MARTYR suffers for a cause or a principle and strives to feel noble and superior through this suffering. Questions on the Lifestyle Scale relating to each of these typology catagories can receive a score of 1 to 5. A score of 4 or 5 indicates a high rating for a particular question; a score of 3 indicates an average rating; and a score of 1 or 2 indicates a low rating. Scores obtained from each individual were computed for each typology catagory. The mean scores for each catagory are listed in columns labeled HIGH, AVERAGE, and LOW.

Results

Results are presented in terms of percentage tables covering the responses from the total population interviewed and concentrate on the highest scores obtained using the Lifestyle Scale instrument with regard to the five typologies described above.

Table 1

Lifestyle Scale - Battered Women

	HIGH	AVERAGE	LOW
CONTROLLER	21%	16%	63%
PERFECTIONIST	30%	27%	43%
NEED TO PLEASE	77%	13%	10%
VICTIM	36%	24%	40%
MARTYR	24%	27%	49%

The data in Table 1 show that the majority of battered women score highest on NEED TO PLEASE.

Table 2

Lifestyle Scale - Non-Battered Women

	HIGH	AVERAGE	LOW
CONTROLLER	28%	40%	32%
PERFECTIONIST	26%	40%	34%
NEED TO PLEASE	5%	34%	61%
VICTIM	2%	27%	71%
MARTYR	6%	26%	68%

The data in Table 2 show that the majority of non-battered women score highest on CONTROLLER.

A chi square test of significance was computed comparing the distibution of total scores of the 30 battered women listed in all five catagories to the total scores of the 30 non-battered women listed in all five catagories. The observed frequency were the battered women, and totals for each catagory is shown in Table 3. The expected frequency were the non-battered women, and totals for each catagory is shown in Table 4.

Table 3

Observed Frequency - Battered Women

	1	2	3	4	5
	Controller	Perfectionist	Need to Please	Victim	Martyr
Total Scores	519	603	850	616	566

Table 4

Expected Frequency - Non-Battered Women

	1	2	3	4	5
	Controller	Perfectionist	Need to Please	Victim	Martyr
Total Scores	609	608	476	436	455

After computation, the chi value is shown to be 125.737. Using 4 degrees of freedom, the probability of 125.737 is less than .001.

$\chi^2 = 125.737 \quad p < .001.$

$df = 4$

Conclusion and Discussion

The data in this study lend support to the hypothesis that the lifestyle typologies of women who are currently victims or who have recently been victims of repeated battering incidents are significantly different typologies than the lifestyle typologies of those women who have never been the victims of battering. Furthermore, the study provides evidence that women who score high in the catagory of NEED TO PLEASE lend themselves as targets in situations where battering is likely to occur and shows that women who score high in the catagory of CONTROLLER are not as likely to be victims of physical abuse.

This study can be of valuable help to both battered women and non-battered women by making them aware of their lifestyle typologies. Through effective counseling, the information contained herein could help to curb the rising battering rate among women. In addition, it could serve as a guide in screening potential victims of physical abuse.

This study provides support for future research on this topic.

*LIFESTYLE SCALE
by Roy M. Kern

Directions: Read each statement and apply the following scale to each. Work rapidly. Your first reaction is probable most accurate.

1. never applies to me.
2. seldom applies to me.
3. applies sometimes to me.
4. applies often to me.
5. perfectly applies to me.

1. _____ dislike riding airplanes
2. _____ enjoys being neat, hair in place, and immaculate dresser.
3. _____ extremely sensitive to hurting others feelings.
4. _____ often chooses friends and acquaintances who are strong, protective and helpful.
5. _____ life is full of hardships but it's worth it.
6. _____ dislike swimming.
7. _____ seldom satisfied with one's accomplishments.
8. _____ likes to have continual praise from others such as peers or boss.
9. _____ usually chooses friends that appear to have many interpersonal problems at work, etc.
10. _____ really tries hard but usually gets the short end of the stick.
11. _____ has had or is having problems with sexual relationships.
12. _____ accomplishes much more than co-workers and may call this fact to their attention.
13. _____ excellent at finding fault with self.
14. _____ likes to hear what is "wrong with" themselves."

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15. _____ likes to tell others how it could have been done.

16. _____ likes to have the last word in conversations.

17. _____ very knowledgable about a particular topic and takes pride in this.

18. _____ dislikes arguments and finds self attempting to be the peace maker.

19. _____ felt punished a lot as a child and often times as an employee now.

20. _____ anticipates future circumstances; often heard to say "see, I told you. . ."

21. _____ does not like surprises such as rule changes at the last moment, uninvited company, etc.

22. _____ doesn't like mistakes to be made by peer or subordinates.

23. _____ viewed by others as sweet and likeable but also innocent and a bit naive.

24. _____ likes to find fault with other people and good at finding the worst in them.

25. _____ holds people to their end of a bargain; and gets righteously indignant when ehey don't deliver.

26. _____ always buty; can work at two or more projects at the same time.

27. _____ believes that everything has its place and that everything should be in its place.

28. _____ very sensitive and vulnerable; and can easily be hurt by the inconsiderations of others.

29. _____ often feel you are carrying a lot of burderns around with you and don't think you deserve them.

30. _____ depressed a lot of the time about a lot of things.

31. _____ doesn't waste a minute; always has something to do.

32. _____ like to make sure that things run like clockwork.

33. _____ can sometimes be overtrusting, careless, and absentminded.

34. _____ life really seems like a barrel of "rotten apples."

35. _____ very religious person and feel you live up to your religious convictions to the point that you always are doing the right thing all the time.